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CHAPTER 17
ISO-TERIC

ART & STORY
BY VINCE SUZUKAWA

I MEAN, CAN YOU BELIEVE THAT? HIS OWN SISTER, FOR MOST OF THE YEAR!

CRAIKEY, MAITE, THAT'S TERRIBLE. S'THERE ANYTHING AI CAN DO?

THAT'S NICE OF YOU, JAKE, BUT I DUNNO.

HECK, HE TOLD ME THERE'S NOT REALLY ANYTHING I CAN DO.

WELL, AI COULD KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR 'ER. WARN YA.

THAT'S THE THING. HE'S NOT SURE HOW SHE KNOWS ABOUT EVERYTHING SHE'S SEEN. SHE MAY HAVE RECRUITED HELP, AND IT COULD BE ANYONE.

HM.

YOU'VE SEEN SOMETHING SUSPICIOUS LATELY?

MAIYBE.

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YOU KNOW 'OW THE THIRD FLOOR DOESN'T RUN THE ENTIAH LENGTH OF THE BUILDING? AND IT 'AS A DOOR THAT LEADS OUT ONTO THE ROOF OF THE SECOND FLOOR?

I'VE SEEN THAT DOOR. I FIGURED IT'S FOR MAINTENANCE.

RAIGHT. BUT YOU CAN SEE THE ROOF FROM THE OTHAH 'ALLS IN THIS COMPLEX, AND AI'VE NOTICED SOMEONE PROWLING 'ROUND UP THEAH AFTAH HOURS. AND THE WEIRD PART IS... AI THINK AI'VE SEEN 'EM SLIP INTO A SECOND DOOR!

WHAT? HOW?

WELL, YOU'VE 'EARD THE LEGEND 'OW PART OF THE FLOOR BURNT DOWN IN A FIRE, AND THEY SALVAGED THE REST OF THE ROOMS? BUT TH' ROOMS WERE STAGGAHED, SO IF THEY BLOCKED OFF A NEW WALL IN A STRAIGHT LAINE...

...IT MEANT THEY JUST CUT OFF HALF OF ONE OF THE OLD ROOMS?

BINGO! AND THEAH'S NO ENTRANCE TO THAUT HALF-ROOM FROM THE INSAIDE, SO MAI GUESS IS YOU CAN ONLEH ENTER FROM THE OUTSAIDE ROOF.

BEFORE

AFTER

?

COULD JUST BE A STORAGE ROOM, THEN?

YEAH, BUT NOBODY SHOULD BE STOCKING TOILET PAPEH AT THAT TAIME O' DAY.

POSSIBLY. THEY LOOK KAINDA SNEAKY. AND IT'S A GOOD VANTAGE POINT.

YOU... THINK IT COULD BE THE SPY, THEN?

HM. THEY COULD SEE WHEN I MEET UP WITH JEFF. THEY MIGHT BE ABLE TO OVERHEAR WITH THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT. MAYBE EVEN RUN A WIRE TAP TO OUR ROOM!

YER GETTIN' CARRIED AWAY, MAITE.

HEH, OKAY.

I GUESS I NEVER LOOK AT OUR DORM THAT WAY. WHAT ARE YOU DOING ALL EVENING IN THE TOP FLOORS OF THE OTHER HAL--

STUPID, STUPID QUESTION.

SORREH!

SORRY, MAITE, AI THOUGHT AI COULD PICK IT OR SOMETHING.

YOU CAN PICK LOCKS?

ER... NO...BUT IT LOOKS SO EASY IN MOVIES!

LET'S TRY SOMETHING ELSE.

WE COULD BREAK IT DOWN...

TOO NOISY, TOO MUCH EVIDENCE.

BUT Y'KNOW...THERE MIGHT BE ANOTHER WAY AROUND...

OI?

ON THE BALCONY...

HM. I'LL BET YOU COULD MAIKE IT IF THAUT EXTRA WALL WASN'T THEAH.

YEAH, THE ROOFLINE HERE IS LOWER THAN THE OTHER DORMS. I BET THEY BUILT THAT CUZ THERE'VE BEEN TOO MANY ADVENTUROUS STUDENTS SCALING UP THERE TO PARTY.

MAIKES SENSE; NOW THEAH'S NAUT MUCH TO GRAB ONTO.

ONLY ONE HANDHOLD...

IT'D TAIKE A TON O' UPPER BODEH STREN'GTH.

LONG ARMS 'N' LEGS.

CLAIMBING EXPERIENCE.

AND GOOD CLAWS, TOO.

YOU DON'T SAY?

AND WITH ALL THE NOISE FROM YOU MUCKING ABOUT, YOU'LL *ALSO* NEED A DAIVERSION.

HM, POINT...

SO, THAT'S THE PLAN, BORIS. ALL YOU NEED TO DO...

...IS WHAT YOU DO BEST!

NENI

XTRA CRISPY

RAIGHT.

AI'LL GO STAND GUARD. GOOD LUCK.

CRUNCH

THANKS.

CRUNCH

CRUNCH

CRUNCH

I WONDER IF I COULD SNEAK A LADDER UP HERE. NAH, I'VE HEARD THE R.A. IS PRETTY ANAL. I'M PROBABLY PRESSING MY LUCK AS IT IS; I SHOULD GET A MOVE ON.

GONNA NEED ALL THE HELP I CAN GET. BETTER DITCH THE SHOES AND SHIRT.

CRAP. EVEN IF I GET BEYOND THIS, IT'S STILL GONNA BE A STRETCH.

I NEED MOMENTUM. WHICH I CAN'T GET WITHOUT ANOTHER FOOTHOLD...

HMM...

THAT JUST MIGHT WORK...

HOKAY THEN... I MUST NOT DIE A VIRGIN, I MUST NOT DIE A VIRGIN, I MUST NOT DIE A VIRGIN...

WHEW! NOT GONNA DIE A VIRGIN.

A SKYLIGHT? EH, FROSTED OVER. GUESS I STILL GOTTA INVESTIGATE UP CLOSE.

THE INSIDE DOOR WAS LOCKED; I HOPE THAT MEANS THIS ONE'S UNLOCKED...

THE HELL? IT..IT'S A JAPANESE GARDEN?

A BONSAI GARDEN?!

VZZZT

VZZZT

HIDE

CLICK

FERTILIZE

AW, CRAP. I AM *SO* GONNA DIE A VIRGIN...

IS THAT...THOR? SO THOSE TINY LITTLE PLANTS ARE ALL--

SNORT

OH, NO!

WHOOPS. SON OF A-- AH, WELL

?!

UNG. CAN'T HOLD IT ANY LONGER...

AH--

AH--

AH--

AH--

WACHOO!

BONK

OW!!!

MOTHERF--

CRAP CRAP CRAP CRAP CRAP

WAIT, I'M STILL ALIVE? DIDN'T HE FOLLOW ME? THERE'S NO WAY IN HELL HE COULD'VE MISSED THAT.

DOES THAT MEAN HE... SHOULD I...

AW, MAN...

I'M SORRY. DID I... RUIN ANY OF THEM?

NO, JUST THEIR POTS...

IT'S LIKE THIS PLACE WAS BUILT FOR YOU. THERE'S EVEN NATURAL LIGHTING.

YEAH, THE SKYLIGHT WAS CHEAPER THAN FIXING THE CEILING, THEY DISCOVERED.

I'M SURPRISED NO ONE ELSE CLAIMED IT.

WELL, IT WAS INTENDED TO BE STORAGE. BUT MOST OF THE STAFF CONSIDERS THIS FLOOR CURSED. SEEMS A LOT OF... *INCIDENTS* HAPPEN TO THIS DORM. SO NOBODY LIKES COMING HERE, AND IT'S BEEN ABANDONED FOR AWHILE.

THERE. THAT'S BETTER.

IN CASE OF FIRE DO NOT USE ELEVATORS

IN CASE OF COUCH DO NOT USE STAIRS

IN CASE OF GIANT DEADLY ESCAPED LAB ARMY ANTS...UM... YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN

COOL. AND I'LL BET THEY GIVE YOU A GREAT DISCOUNT ON THE RENT, HUH?

YEAH...OF COURSE.

UNLESS... THEY DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU USING IT.

SIGH

YOU'RE NOT GOING TO...TELL ANYONE ABOUT THIS, ARE YOU?

COME ON. DO I LOOK LIKE THE SNITCHING TYPE?

SEEING AS HOW *I'M* NOT REALLY SUPPOSED TO BE HERE EITHER. AHEH...

YES... HOW LONG DID YOU THINK I WAS GOING TO LET THAT SLIDE?

THEY HAVEN'T EXACTLY NOMINATED ME FOR EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH EVER SINCE THE FIRE. I DIDN'T THINK THEY'D APPROVE, SO I I JUST MOVED IN HERE OVER THE BREAK.



I'D NEVER HAVE GUESSED THE LOCK WAS TAMPERED WITH...

NAH, I JUST CLIMBED UP TO THE ROOF FROM THE BALCONY.

THE BALCONY...? OVER THE EXTRA WALL?!

YUP.

WHA...HOW... NOBODY COULD CLIMB THAT!

I DIDN'T SAY IT WAS *EASY*.

YOU COULD'VE KILLED YOURSELF!

YEAH, WELL, I HAD IMPORTANT BUSINESS. SOMEONE'S BEEN STALKING ME ***AND*** A GOOD BUDDY OF MINE.

REALLY? LOTSA CRAZIES OUT THERE, I GUESS.

TELL ME ABOUT IT. I THOUGHT I HAD GOTTEN A LEAD ON THEM UP HERE, BUT HEH, IT WAS ONLY YOU. OOH, THAT REMINDS ME, I SHOULD TEXT JAKE THAT I'M OKAY...

SURE YOU'RE OKAY... ONLY BECAUSE YOU GOT LUCKY. WHAT IF YOU HAD FALLEN??

*I DO **NOT** NEED ANY DEAD EXTREME SPORTS WANNABES ON MY CONSCIENCE TOO! NOT AFTER ALL THE SPYING. THIS HAS GONE WAY TOO FAR...*

OODY, I, UH... HAVE A CONFESSION TO MAKE...

WHASSUP?

JUST WHEN I WAS STARTING TO THINK YOU MIGHT NOT BE A COMPLETE BASTARD AFTER ALL. WHY THE HELL ARE YOU ASSOCIATING WITH THAT...THAT--

NOW HOLD UP. YOU DON'T KNOW HER.

HAVE YOU EVEN MET HER? I'VE SEEN HER TAKE DOWN DRUNK DRIVERS, DEADBEAT SPOUSES, EMBEZZLERS, ALMOST DAILY. SHE'S NO MONSTER.

YEAH, YEAH. SO...WHAT HAPPENS IF SHE GETS ASSIGNED TO A GAY HATE CRIME CASE, HUH?

I SWEAR, THAT ISN'T THE ISSUE. SHE'S NOT. HOMOPHOBIC. AND NEITHER AM I.

RIGHT, YOU'RE BOTH JUST TWO PEAS IN A POD. SO HOW DID YOU GET SUCKED INTO THIS MESS, THEN? WHAT'D SHE OFFER YOU?

NOTHING.

NOTHING? AS IF.

REALLY.

SHE ONLY APPROACHED ME SINCE I WORK NEAR JEFF.

I THOUGHT IT WAS SOME SILLY SIBLING RIVALRY GAME.

BUT, I FIGURED I'D NEED LEGAL ADVICE ON MY DEBT WITH THE SCHOOL AT SOME POINT. SO I DID IT AS A FAVOR... AT FIRST.

AND I WON'T LIE. I'D WATCHED JEFF ANONYMOUSLY PLAYING PRANKS ON STUDENTS WHO'D CAUSED EXCESS REPAIRS. I THOUGHT HE WAS COWARDLY AND IMMATURE. I DIDN'T NEED MUCH PERSUADING.

DO NOT WALK ON THE GRASS OR ELSE

AND WHAT WAS YOUR BEEF WITH ME?

...

OH...RIGHT. UM, WE WEREN'T EXACTLY WINNING POINTS WITH EACH OTHER FROM THE GET-GO, WERE WE?

NOPE.

UNBELIEVABLE. SO...WHAT KIND OF BLACKMAIL DID YOU HAVE IN STORE FOR *ME*, HUH?

C'MON, I'M NOT PROUD OF WHAT I DID. BUT I ONLY AGREED TO SPY ON YOU TO SEE HOW FAR YOU WERE GETTING ON WITH JEFF.

MM-HM. AND WHAT ABOUT OUR LITTLE CONFRONTATIONS AT THE HANGOUT, HUH?

ER, OKAY, I ADMIT, THE FIRST TIME IT WAS ALL ME. BUT THE NEXT TIME, MAUREEN SUGGESTED I PICK A FIGHT--AND LET YOU WIN.

YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO BE THE HERO. SHE WANTED TO SHOW THAT YOU DIDN'T NEED JEFF'S HELP TO HOOK UP WITH DOUG. BUT, WELL, THEN YOUR BUDDY INTERFERED...

PLUS I'D ALREADY ASKED DOUG ANYWAY.

YEAH... WE HAD NO IDEA.

THE POINT IS, IT WAS NOTHING PERSONAL AGAINST YOU, OR DOUG. IF IT'D WORKED OUT RIGHT, SHE MIGHT HAVE NEVER BOTHERED YOU AGAIN.

SO WHAT ABOUT JEREMY? WHAT GAVE YOU THE RIGHT TO RUIN HIS LIFE?

SIGH...IT'S JUST...REENA, ER, MAUREEN CAN BE PRETTY PERSUASIVE. SHE SAID WE WERE ONLY SPEEDING UP THE INEVITABLE.

I DOUBT JEFF WAS GIVING YOU THE FULL STORY. I MEAN, DO YOU HONESTLY THINK JEREMY'S PARENTS WOULD SIMPLY ACCEPT PHOTOS FROM A TOTAL STRANGER?

THEY ACTUALLY HAD SUSPECTED ALL ALONG...JEFF WASN'T VERY DISCREET. MAYBE HE SHOULD'VE BEEN THINKING OF JEREMY'S LIVING SITUATION FIRST, RATHER THAN SEX.

WHY DIDN'T HE JUST WAIT A YEAR FOR JEREMY TO GRADUATE AND MOVE OUT?

THAT'S NOT FOR HER TO JUDGE. DON'T YOU HAVE A MIND OF YOUR OWN?

I COULDN'T HELP IT; I WAS IN TOO DEEP AT THAT POINT.

AW, POOR BABY. GUESS SHE REALLY MUSTA HAD YOU BY THE--

LOOK, I... I'M IN LOVE!

WHOA, I DIDN'T MEAN *LITERALLY*! SO IS PSYCHO-BITCHAPHILIA THE NEW FETISH THESE DAYS?

YOU'RE TREADING ON DANGEROUS GROUND, KID.

OKAY, OKAY, I'M SORRY. I GUESS...SOME PEOPLE DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW I COULD WANT ANOTHER GUY, SO IT'S NOT MY BUSINESS TO JUDGE WHO YOU FALL IN LOVE WITH.

S'ALRIGHT. MY FEELINGS FOR HER ARE UNQUESTIONABLY A BIT... COMPLICATED.

STILL, I DON'T GET WHY SHE HASN'T LET UP.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

THE WHOLE POINT OF HER DAMN VENDETTA IS SHE WAS BITTER AT THE PROSPECT OF DYING ALONE AND CHILDLESS.

BUT SHE HAS *YOU* NOW! PROBLEM SOLVED, RIGHT?

IF SHE KNEW SHE "HAD" ME.

WHA--? OH, COME ON. DON'T TELL ME YOU'RE EVEN MORE OF A COWARD THAN I AM?

HMPH. I TOLD YOU, IT'S COMPLICATED.

THING IS, SHE'S LOOKING FOR SOMEONE WHO'D BE A GOOD FATHER, YOU KNOW, NOT JUST A HUSBAND. SHE'LL HOLD THEM TO PRETTY HIGH STANDARDS. AND, UH, YOU'VE HEARD SHE'S RATHER...UNFORGIVING OF LIARS.

TRY ABUSING SCHOOL RESOURCES, TRESPASSING, RENT EVASION, ALL THAT GOOD STUFF. DID YOU FORGET WHERE WE ARE?

AH... RIGHT.

DIRTY LITTLE SECRETS, HUH? LEMME GUESS, YOU HAD A FLING WITH A FLORIST?

WELL, NO...

SO MAN UP AND TELL HER. IT'S NOT LIKE YOU'VE KILLED ANYONE...IS SHE GONNA REAM YOU FOR ONE TRANSGRESSION?

IT ISN'T JUST THAT.

I HAVEN'T EXACTLY BEEN UP FRONT WITH HER ABOUT EVERYTHING.

CRIPES. LIKE WHAT?

EARLY ON... SINCE I HAD REFUSED PAYMENT, SHE INSISTED ON TAKING ME TO A NICE DINNER. WE HAD A GREAT TIME... AND SOME **REALLY** GREAT WINE...

AND AFTER ONE LITTLE DISPLAY OF CHIVARLY, SHE CHEERFULLY NOTED I WAS "NOTHING LIKE" HER EX-FIANCE.

WITH HER GUARD DOWN, SHE FILLED ME IN ON THE WHOLE STORY ABOUT WENDELL. AND IT SOUNDED LIKE THE BEST WAY TO IMPRESS HER WOULD BE TO PLAY UP THE TESTOSTERONE.

AND REGRETTABLY, I RESOLVED TO WORK ON THAT THE NEXT TIME WE MET.

I PULLED THE MANLY-MAN ACT WHENEVER SHE WAS AROUND, ALWAYS TALKING ABOUT THE GYM, FLEXING, HELPING MOVE FURNITURE--

---KNOCKING OVER INNOCENT WAITERS...

SIGH. AND THAT. I STILL NEED TO APOLOGIZE TO DOUG FOR THAT. I WASN'T THINKING OF THE CONSEQUENCES... ANY OF THEM.

NOW I MAY HAVE SABOTAGED ANY CHANCE AT SHOWING A NURTURING, FATHERLY SIDE. I'M PROBABLY JUST A SLAB OF MEAT TO HER.

SPEAKING AS A FELLOW SLAB OF MEAT, YOUR TENDING TO ITTY-BITTY PLANTS COULD'VE WON POINTS WITH HER... IF YOU HADN'T LIED ABOUT THOSE, TOO.

DON'T REMIND ME.

STILL, YOU SHOULD GIVE HER A CHANCE TO SAY HOW SHE FEELS ABOUT YOU. SHE MIGHT EVEN SURPRISE YOU.

WHY NOT?

THERE'S NO POINT.

SERIOUSLY, THINK ABOUT IT. I'M A PENNILESS GRUNT, UP TO MY HORNS IN DEBT TO AN EMPLOYER I HATE. AND THEN LOOK AT HER--A SMART, ATTRACTIVE, WEALTHY LAWYER WHO IS ON THE FAST TRACK TO SUCCESS.

OH, BUT I'M NOT AFTER HER FOR HER ***MONEY!*** NO, THIS IS ACTUALLY ***TWUE WUV,*** RIGHT?

WHO IN THEIR RIGHT MIND IS GOING TO BELIEVE THAT? HELL, I'D BARELY BELIEVE IT MYSELF IF I WERE IN SOMEONE ELSE'S SHOES.

THEN YOU'RE NOT GONNA SAY ANYTHING?

THAT'LL TAKE YEARS, WON'T IT? AND SHE WANTS KIDS ASAP.

SO... YOU'LL JUST... JUST...

NOPE. NOT UNTIL MY DEBT IS PAID OFF.

DON'T YOU THINK I KNOW THAT? BUT I HAVE NO CHOICE HERE. MY HANDS ARE TIED.

LOOK, I'M PRETTY MUCH WRAPPED UP HERE. UM, THANKS FOR LISTENING, MAN.

ANYTIME. MAYBE IT'LL STILL WORK OUT SOMEHOW.

MAYBE.

C'MON, LET'S GET OUT OF HERE. I TRY NOT TO STAY IN HERE TOO LONG.

I WISH I KNEW HOW JEFF PULLS OFF THAT PSYCHOBABBLE STUFF...

CLICK

YER ABSOLUTELY RAIGHT, BORIS...AI SHOULD TELL ZACH THAT AI-- OI, CODY!

MUNCH

MUNCH

HEY GUYS, SORRY THAT TOOK SO LONG.

SO WOT WAS IN THEAH? DEAD BODIES? ELVIS? THE LOST CITY OF ATLANTIS?

YEAH, ABOUT THAT...

HUH... IT'S NOT MY POSITION TO SAY ANYTHING ABOUT THOR'S SITUATION...

IT WAS JUST... STORAGE.

STORAGE?! YOU WERE THERE ALL THAUT TAIME FOAH STORAGE?

'FRAID SO.

STRANGE, THOUGH...THOR SURE SEEMED EAGAH TO GET 'IS ARSE IN THEAH...

WEIRD. UH...MAYBE HE WANTED OUT THERE FOR A SMOKE?

P'RHAPS. YA SHOULDA SEEN 'IM...POLAITE AS ANYTHING, BUT JUST HOISTED ME CLEAR OUTTA THE WAY.

COME T' THINK OF IT, MAITE, 'E MAKES A BETTAH BOUNCAH THAN YOU DO!

BETTER? AS IF! I COULDA TAKEN HIM OFF IF I'D BEEN THERE...

NAUT FROM WOT AI'VE SEEN.

WHAT'S THAT SUPPOSED TO-- *HEY!*

NO! NO! QUIT IT!

AHAHAHAHAHA

WOT, ME, BITTAH 'BOUT YOU LEAVIN' US TO WORRY ALL THIS TIME? NAUT AT ALL! BORIS, HOLD DOWN AN ARM, WILLYA?

I'M SORRY, I'M *SORRY!!*

VAAAHAHAA

iSQ CHAPTER 18

FIRE AND EYESORE

THE NEXT DAY AT THE HANGOUT

SIGH

CODY, CAN I SEE YOU IN MY OFFICE FOR A SEC?

YAAAH! YES'M.

THIS IS WHERE YOU FIRE ME, ISN'T IT? I FIGURED THIS WAS COMING. I DON'T BLAME YOU, I'LL BET YOU ALL HATE ME NOW.

NOT AT ALL, CODY. NOBODY HATES YOU.

I MEAN... I WAS FINALLY WARMING UP TO YOU, AND I HOPED IT MIGHT WORK OUT...BUT IF NOT, THEN I GUESS IT'S FOR THE BEST. THE THING IS...HONESTLY, IT WAS GOOD FOR DOUG.

FOR ONCE, IT DIDN'T END IN A HURRY SIMPLY BECAUSE HE WAS DATING A FREAK. HE HAD TO SHARE SOME OF THE RESPONSIBILITY, AND... Y'KNOW, LOOK INSIDE HIMSELF THIS TIME. AND I THINK HE'S LEARNED FROM IT.

SO I REALIZE IT COULD BE A LITTLE AWKWARD AROUND HERE FOR A BIT, BUT I WANTED TO REASSURE YOU THAT WE'RE NOT GOING TO SHOVE YOU OUT THE DOOR. OKAY?

WELL, THANKS... BUT ACTUALLY...I WAS GOING TO TELL YOU I'M PLANNING TO QUIT AT THE END OF THE SEMESTER.

DO YOU KNOW THIS IS THE FIRST RELATIONSHIP HE'S HAD THAT ENDED NORMALLY? HE DIDN'T GET SCREAMED AT, STOLEN FROM, OR TOTALLY ABANDONED. YOU TWO JUST SAT DOWN, AND TALKED IT OUT. MINIMAL DRAMA.

OH.

...SO, YEAH, BETWEEN THE AWKWARDNESS, AND, ER, MY, GPA--

I UNDERSTAND. THANKS FOR GIVING US PLENTY OF NOTICE...

WE CAN FIND SOMEONE BEFORE WINTER BREAK NOW.

I'LL ASK AROUND.

RANDALL MIGHT BE INTERESTED. HE'S KINDA BIG, NOT A PUSHOVER, KICKS ASS AT HOCKEY...

WAIT, HE'S UNDERAGE, TOO. BETTER NOT RISK THAT.

WHO ELSE DO I KNOW THAT'S--

NO... THAT'S CRAZY.

AND YET...IT WORKS. THOR'S QUALIFIED. AND HE WANTS A JOB THAT ISN'T THROUGH THE SCHOOL, AND WHERE HE'LL GET A LITTLE RESPECT. IF TYRONE CAN GIVE HIM A BETTER PAYMENT PLAN, HE MAY FEEL LESS LIKE A SLAVE.

PLUS, IT'S A NIGHT JOB. HE COULD DO THE PARENTING THANG, **AND** KEEP WORKING...

THEN NOBODY COULD ACCUSE HIM OF GOLD-DIGGING.

SAY, SAM? TYRONE'S STILL WINNING ALL THOSE BARTENDING COMPETITIONS, RIGHT?

OH, HECK YEAH.

I KEEP TELLIN' HIM HE SHOULD INVEST SOMEWHERE, BUT HE'S SO PARANOID ABOUT THAT RIGHT NOW.

WHY DO YOU ASK?

WELL...

ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR FREAKIN' MIND???

WHOA!

GO WING SOMEWHERE ΦΛΥ

GO WING SOMEWHERE ΦΛΥ

THE HANG

RUN AWAY, RUN AWAY!

TYRONE?

MEETING!!

...SO, YEAH, BETWEEN THE AWKWARDNESS, AND, ER, MY, GPA--

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WHOA!

GO WING SOMEWHERE ΦΛΥ

GO WING SOMEWHERE ΦΛΥ

THE HANG

RUN AWAY, RUN AWAY!

TYRONE?

MEETING!!

..I'LL JUST GLOSS OVER THAT WHOLE SPYING PART,..

HONESTLY, HE'S NOT AS BAD AS HE SEEMS. HE WAS JUST...MISGUIDED, AND PLAYING UP THE MACHO ACT FOR PRETTY MUCH THE REASONS I DID, WHEN YOU FIRST MET ME.

AND I TURNED OUT TO BE AN OKAY GUY, RIGHT?

HMPH. I SAY HE STILL OWES DOUG ONE HELL OF AN APOLOGY. FRANKLY, HE OWES ONE TO ALL OF US.

HE WILL. HE *WANTS* TO.

COME ON, IT'S BEEN MONTHS. WHY DIDN'T HE DO THAT BEFORE NOW? I THINK IT'S TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE AT THIS POINT.

MAYBE HE WAS AFRAID HE'D GET TARRED AND FEATHERED BEFORE HE COULD SPEAK.

ACTUALLY...

I'M NOT SAYING WE SHOULD FORGIVE HIM, BUT I THINK WE CAN AT LEAST HEAR HIM OUT. I'D KINDA LIKE TO KNOW WHAT HE HAS TO SAY.

WHOA. HE SPEAKS!

HM, COULD BE INTERESTING.

TELL YOU WHAT, CODY, WHY DON'T YOU BRING THOR BY TOMORROW? WE CAN ALL SEE IF HE SOUNDS SINCERE. THEN...WE CAN SEE HOW IT GOES FROM THERE, ALRIGHT?

ROGER.

SO THEY'RE NOT JUST PLANNING TO TAR AND FEATHER ME?

NAH. C'MON, I'LL EVEN BUY YOU A DRINK.

YOU SURE NOBODY'LL SPIT IN IT?

OF COURSE NOT. THAT'D NEVER HAPPEN HERE.

THERE'S *FAR* MORE INTERESTING BODILY FLUIDS WE USE!

JUST KIDDING! LEMME GO FIND DOUG.

YOU'RE TASTING MY DRINK FIRST.

LOOK, THERE'S A MULTITUDE OF REASONS I COULD GIVE...NO, I HAVE TO BE HONEST, MOST OF THEM WERE JUST EXCUSES. AND WHETHER THEY MADE ANY MORE SENSE TO ME AT THE TIME THAN THEY DO NOW IS IRRELEVANT. I FIGURED AS LONG AS NOBODY ACTUALLY GOT INJURED, IT WAS OKAY, AND I ALMOST SUCCEEDED THERE.

SO I'LL JUST SAY IT: I WAS AN IDIOT. A TOTAL AND COMPLETE IDIOT, AND I'M SORRY.

I HAD SOMETHING TO PROVE, FOR A REASON THAT NO LONGER EXISTS, AND I WAS COWARDLY FOR NOT COMING BACK HERE AS SOON AS IT DIDN'T.

I APOLOGIZE FOR ALL THE TROUBLE AND AGGRAVATION I CAUSED. IT WON'T HAPPEN AGAIN.

UH, DON'T MENTION IT.

THANKS, MAN.

PSSST...THINK YOU COULD...COME BACK A FEW MORE TIMES? MAYBE GIVE SOME EXTRA TIPS?

MIGHT PROVE YOU REALLY MEANT IT.

WELL...I SUPPOSE.

OVER THE COURSE OF THE NEXT WEEK...

YOU SURE IT'S A GOOD IDEA TO KEEP COMING BACK? I DON'T THINK SAM WANTS ME HERE.

EH, SHE'LL BE ALRIGHT.

PLUS, AREN'T YOU SICK OF TASTING MY DRINK FIRST?

YEAH, KINDA.

THE FOLLOWING WEEK...

CHK CHK CHK

CHK CHK

DAMMIT.

ROTTEN PIECE OF--

TINK TINK

WELL, HELLOOOO, FLUFFY NURSE!

HM... I WONDER IF HE'S--

CRUD. CAN'T BE SEEN YET...

BETTER GO AROUND...

S'CUSE ME, SWEETHEART. YA GOTTA LIGHT?

UM, SURE.

CLICK

GRUNT

STUPID BITCH. THIS'LL TAKE FOREVER WITH MATCHES...

NOOYEAH. THAT'S MORE LIKE IT!

HEY, SWEETIE! MISS ME?

WHOA!

WHO--STEVE?! ARE YOU ON SOMETHING? DON'T TELL ME YOU--HEY, WOULD YOU STOP THAT?

AWW, YER NOT STILL MAD 'BOUT THE MONEY, ARE YA?

WHAT DO *YOU* THINK? I'M STILL PAYING ALL THAT OFF!

OH, HON. I'LL MAKE IT UP TO YOU. IF YOU LET ME STAY WITH YOU, I CAN..."WORK" IT OFF. IF YOU YOU GET MY DRIFT...

CAN WE HELP YOU?

MAYBE LATER, HUNKY.

RIGHT NOW I'M CATCHIN' UP WITH AN OLD FLAME.

YEAH, WELL, YOU'RE LOOKING AT HIS NEW FLAME HERE.

CODY, YOU SHOULDNT--

REALLY? I SEE HE STILL HAS GOOD TASTE. BUT THIS'LL ONLY TAKE A MINUTE...

ACTUALLY, DOUBIE, WEREN'T YOU SAYING JUST THE OTHER DAY YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO DO A THREE-WAY? WELL, MAYBE THIS IS OUR CHANCE, HM?

I LIKE THE SOUND OF THAT!

THUNK

OH, AND HOW ABOUT THAT! MY, UH, SHIFT'S OVER NOW!

I...

TELL YOU WHAT, HON. WE'LL GO GET STARTED AT MY PLACE, AND YOU CAN JOIN US LATER, OKAY?

AWESOME! MAN. I CAN'T WAIT TO GET MY HANDS ON THAT FLUFFY BODY OF YOURS...

I *TOLD* YOU HE AND DOUG WERE AN ITEM.

...

DUDE, DO YOU, LIKE, LIVE IN A DIFFERENT TIMEZONE? WE THERE YET?

ALMOST!

HUH...THIS IS STARTING TO LOOK KINDA FAMILIAR.

I DON'T DOUBT IT. SO, IS THAT A SPOON IN YOUR POCKET, OR ARE YOU JUST HAPPY TO SEE ME?

UNIVERSITY

MAIN

HOWARD

KING

N

DEMONTFORT POLICE

1200

BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP

WHAT?

THAT'S THE SMOKE DETECTOR!

BEEP

BEEP

BEEP

BEEP

BEEP

OOF!

HEY, IT'S COMIN' FROM THE MEN'S ROOM!

BEEP

JUST CALM DOWN, AND WATCH YOUR STEP. THERE'S NO REASON TO PANIC.

SORRY, MAN...

YOU HEAR THAT?

LET'S GET OUTTA HERE!

BEEP

BEEP

BEEP

BEEP

BEEP

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

YEAH, THANKS.

I THINK THAT'S EVERYONE. YOU CALLING 911, SAM?

YEAH! BUT HAVE YOU SEEN DOUG?

BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP

I THINK I GOT IT...

CAUTION: DO N
ABOVE 140° C
EXPLOSION OR

BANG

CRIPES!

THAT'S NOT GOOD. MAYBE I OUGHTA LET THE FIREMEN HANDLE IT...

YEEOW!

BONK

C'MON, DOUG, GET *OUT*, ALREADY!

SOMETHING'S NOT RIGHT. I'M GONNA GO CHECK THE EMERGENCY EXIT.

I MUST BE CRAZY. BUT I CAN'T AFFORD TO LET THIS JOB GO UP IN SMOKE!

COUGH

COUGH

COUGH

Y'KNOW, IT'D MAKE A LOT MORE SENSE IF THEY'D PUT THESE EXTINGUISHERS LOWER TO THE--

KOFF

KOFF

KOFF

HACK

KOFF

EH? OH, NO!

WHERE..I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR THIS!

FORGET 'EM... I GOTTA GET ON WITH IT.

HOW DO YOU... UH...

CRAP! CAN'T READ THIS WITHOUT--

DO I PULL THIS PIN? I COULD IF THEY DIDN'T MAKE THE HOLE SO DANG SMALL...

WHEW! THERE WE GO!

DOUG! YOU ALIVE? SPEAK TO ME!

RRMM...

S'OKAY, I GOTCHA...

URGH. DOESN'T LOOK LIKE WE'LL FIT THE WAY I CAME IN...

MAYBE--

KOFF. MAN, YOU'RE HEAVY. HANG IN THERE, DOUG...

OUTTA THE WAY!

FFFF--NOT ONE OF YOUR BRIGHTER MOVES, TYRONE.

CLUNK

CRASH

TINKLE

YOU GUYS THERE?

THOR!

I THINK I GOT IT COVERED. C'MON!

1200

WHERE IS EVERYO-- BECKY! HOW BAD WAS IT?

57

JUST CALM DOWN. DOUG, TY, AND THOR ARE AT THE HOSPITAL, BUT THEY'RE ALL GONNA BE FINE. SAM WENT WITH THEM, AND I STAYED BEHIND TO FILE THE REPORT.

HOW...HOW'D IT HAPPEN?

THEY'RE STILL CHECKING, BUT IT LOOKS LIKE IT WAS STARTED BY DOUG'S EX...

WHAT?! WHY THAT...HE'S LUCKY HE'S IN CUSTODY, OTHERWISE I'D--

YEAH, YOU AND SAM BOTH. BUT WORD OF ADVICE, LET'S NOT MAKE DEATH THREATS WHILE THE POLICE ARE STILL AROUND, HMM?

YOUR "FIANCE", HUH?

LIKE YOU'RE NOT USED TO THAT?

AND THEY WOULDN'T HAVE LET YOU IN UNLESS YOU'RE FAMILY.

RADIOLOGY - CT

BURN UNIT

CODY! GOT TIRED OF WAITING FOR YOUR THREESOME?

HEY! YOU'RE ALL RIGHT, TY?

A BIT OF A CONCUSSION, PLUS SMOKE INHALATION. DON'T WORRY, I'LL BE HERE TONIGHT, BUT I'LL BE BACK--

ER...AS SOON AS WE REOPEN.

OH YEAH, WAS JUST A LITTLE SMOKE. DOUG HERE, ON THE OTHER HAND...

REALLY? THAT'S GREAT!

GOOD THING, TOO, THERE'S LOTS OF BUSINESS THAT TIME OF YEAR. STUDENTS DECOMPRESSING, DROWNING THEIR SORROWS OVER THEIR GRADES, PARTYING WITH THEIR FRIENDS BEFORE THE BREAK, CELEBRATING THE HOLIDAYS...

SHOULDN'T TAKE LONG. WE'RE INSURED, AND THE WORST PART IS THE SMOKE DAMAGE. BUT THE PLACE IS PRETTY RESILIENT...WE'LL BE OPEN IN TIME TO CATCH THE TAIL END OF FINALS.

AND GETTING EXTRA DRUNK, WITH NO MORE CLASSES TO WAKE UP FOR...AND BEING CHEAP WITH TIPS, AFTER SAVING UP FOR HOLIDAY GIFTS...

AND THEN THERE'S THOSE JERKS WHO THINK THEY'RE BEING CLEVER WITH MISTLETOE, AND...

UM... DON'T SUPPOSE WE CAN JUST REOPEN AFTER WINTER BREAK?

NOT A CHANCE.

OOOHHH... MAYBE I SHOULD TAKE THE REST OF THE MONTH OFF.

BETTER SAFE THAN SORRY, EH, BOSS?

GOOD TRY.

HERE WE GO AGAIN. LIFE GOT SO COMPLICATED THE LAST TIME THIS HAPPENED...

WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU?

WELL, YOU LEFT THE HOSPITAL BEFORE WE COULD TRACK YOU DOWN.

IT WAS PAST VISTING HOURS, AND I DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO FIND YOU OUTSIDE THE BAR.

TRUE. CODY TOLD US WHERE YOU WORKED.

I SEE.

ALSO, WE WANTED TO THANK YOU FOR ALL YOUR HELP LAST NIGHT. WE WERE...SORT OF WONDERING IF YOU'D BE INTERESTED IN A JOB AS THE BOUNCER.

ME? WHAT ABOUT CODY?

HE'S RESIGNING ONCE WINTER BREAK STARTS.

SO, IT... LOOKS NICE AROUND HERE. YOU DO GREAT WORK.

WHY, THANK YOU.

AAAAND I'D LIKE TO APOLOGIZE FOR MY, ER, RECENT BEHAVIOR. I GUESS I HAVE TROUBLE GETTING OVER GRUDGES.

OH, APOLOGY ACCEPTED. I CAN HARDLY BLAME YOU UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES.

AHEM.

UM... CONTRARY TO WHAT YOU MIGHT BELIEVE, I'M NOT TRULY ALL THAT AGGRESSIVE.

NEITHER WAS CODY. BUT YOU'VE DEMONSTRATED YOU CAN THINK ON YOUR FEET AND TAKE CHARGE OF A BAD SITUATION; THOSE ARE EXCELLENT QUALIFICATIONS RIGHT THERE.

AND...UH... I STILL HAVE SOME FINANCIAL ENTANGLEMENTS WITH MONEY I OWE THE SCHOOL.

WE CAN HELP THERE TOO. I'M PRETTY SOLVENT, EVEN IF I WASN'T INSURED UP THE WAZOO. C'MON, WHADDAYA SAY?





GUESS I WON'T BE NEEDING THAT ANYMORE.

LET'S GO TALK TO THE TREASURER.

'SUP?

CODY, WAIT UP!

IT SEEMS THE HANGOUT STAFF WANTS TO HIRE ME AS THEIR NEW BOUNCER.

HEY, THAT'S GREAT! CONGRATS!

I DON'T SUPPOSE...YOU HAD ANYTHING TO DO WITH IT?

WHO, ME? THE WHOLE DORM KNOWS YOU HATE THIS JOB.

PERHAPS. UH. LISTEN...

I DON'T KNOW HOW I CAN EVER THANK YOU ENOUGH FOR THIS...

THANK ME FOR WHAT? NOBODY TOLD YOU TO GO IN AFTER TYRONE, MAN, THAT WAS ALL YOU!

IT'S NOT JUST THAT, IT'S THAT I... NOW I'M FINALLY ABLE TO TELL MAUREEN HOW I REALLY FEEL. AND THIS IS ALL AFTER EVERYTHING I... WE HAD DONE TO YOU. YOU HAD EVERY RIGHT TO HATE US. WHY DID YOU TRY TO HELP SET ME UP THERE?

EH, NOT TO SOUND CHEESY, BUT...HELL, IF THERE'S ANYTHING THIS SEMESTER HAS TAUGHT ME, THERE'S TOO MUCH BULLSHIT IN THIS WORLD KEEPING US FROM BEING WITH WHOEVER WE WANT...

I'M JUST DOING MY PART, DUDE.

WELL... GOOD LUCK TO YOU, THEN.

LIKE-WISE.

. . .

HEY, I--

CODY? WHAT ARE YOU--

DON'T JUST STAND THERE, GET INSIDE!

WHOA!

JEFF, JUST CHILL!

YOU KNOW YOU SHOULDN'T BE SEEN HERE! WHY DIDN'T YOU TEXT ME FIRST?

I WANTED TO TELL YOU IN PERSON. EVERYTHING'S GOING TO BE OKAY. YOUR SISTER...THE STALKING... IT'S ALL TAKEN CARE OF.

HEAR ME OUT...

HUH? WHAT DID YOU DO? CODY, I WARNED YOU TO STAY AWAY FROM HER!

THIS HAS ALL BEEN ABOUT HER BIOLOGICAL CLOCK, RIGHT? WELL, WHAT IF SHE'S HAD SOMEONE INTERESTED IN HER ALL ALONG?

LIKE WHO?

I...I CAN'T BELIEVE IT'S FINALLY OVER. I HAVE TO TALK TO HER, WE--

WAIT! NOT YET! HE'S STILL GOTTA--

SO...DID YOU DO THIS, EXPECTING YOU AND I TO... Y'KNOW?

NAH, IT'S TOO SOON AFTER DOUG FOR THAT.

JEFF, I INTERVENED WITH YOUR SISTER AS A FRIEND. BUT AS FOR YOU AND I, WELL...HOW DID YOU PUT IT...

I THINK FOR NOW, I'M JUST GLAD I'M FREE TO BE... CONSIDERING ALL THE POSSIBILITIES.

HOWEVER, THERE IS STILL ONE THING I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR AFTER ALL THIS TIME.

DO TELL?

WHERE WERE WE NOW? BEST THREE OUT OF FIVE?

FOUR OUT OF SEVEN, THANK YOU VERY MUCH...

TO BE CONCLUDED

JUNE 2010

FOR THE SAFETY OF YOURSELF AND OTHERS

PLEASE BACK THE FUCK AWAY FROM THE TIGER.



THANK YOU!